Assassination questions persist

UW-Stevens Point professor says U.S. still keeping secrets

By PETER MALLER
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Stevens Point — Thirty years after the death of President John F. Kennedy, the government still keeps the truth of his assassination a secret, a top authority on the subject believes.

Lee Harvey Oswald did not kill Kennedy, said David Wrone, a history professor at the University of Wisconsin — Stevens Point.

But don't expect to learn who really shot him by reading the 800,000 documents released in August at the National Archives, said Wrone, who spent part of the summer sifting through the papers at an office in Washington, D.C.

"When they released the information, they said it would contain all of President (Lyndon B.) Johnson's telephone logs — and that's a lie," Wrone said.

Censors held back transcripts of key conversations Johnson had right after the assassination with the FBI, the CIA and Abe Fortas, Johnson's friend and a member of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Numerous other vital papers also were excluded from the highly publicized release of materials this summer, Wrone said.

The government still refuses to release at least 3 million pages that could shed light on Kennedy's assassination Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas, Wrone said.

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As much as 25% of the information in the papers at the archives has been "blacked out so you can't read it," he said.

The material Wrone examined was made public after Congress passed the John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992.

The law was enacted after Oliver Stone's movie "JFK" triggered a public outcry for reliable information.

Wrone was nominated by Stone to the five-member JFK Assassination Records Commission, which gathered the material for the archives. But Wrone's name was not approved by the White House.

"They picked people who had no knowledge of the assassination," Wrone said. "The government still doesn't want citizens to know what happened."

Even sorting through the documents at the archives was made extremely difficult, he said. All the pages have been filed without any index system.

"How does the average person go in there and start reading?" asked Wrone, who has spent 25 years studying the assassination and is writing a book about the investigation. "The answer is, they can't."

David W. Belin, former legal counsel to the Warren Commission, supports releasing all the assassination papers.

Only then will people have sufficient proof that Oswald was the killer, said Belin, who practices law in Des Moines, Iowa.

"I come to this with the perspective of being among very few people — perhaps two or three in the entire world — who have had access to all of the CIA files," Belin said in a telephone interview. "Having had access, I know that releasing all of them would reinforce that Oswald was the gunman and that he acted alone."

But the CIA continues to shroud its information in secrecy, mainly to protect informants, "particularly foreign sources," Belin said.

To further connect Oswald to Kennedy, Belin pointed to Oswald's killing of J.D. Tippit, the police officer who encountered Oswald about an hour and 15 minutes after Kennedy's death.

"Oswald was apprehended with the murder weapon (used to kill Tippit) in hand, and six witnesses saw him (Oswald) running away with the murder weapon," Belin said.

Investigators later learned that the pistol used to shoot Tippit had been sent to Oswald at the same post office box as the rifle used to kill Kennedy, Belin said.

"I don't think anybody knows who killed John F. Kennedy," Wrone countered. The government's cover-up stems mainly from embarrassment, he said.

Washington officials don't want citizens to know how badly the investigation was botched, he said.

In 1964, the Warren Commission, led by then Chief Justice Earl Warren, concluded that Oswald, acting alone, shot Kennedy from a window on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.

As president, Johnson was too preoccupied with "solidifying his grip on power" to take much interest in how the investigation proceeded, Wrone said.

And FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover wanted his agency to ap-

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pear in control of all the nation's enemies, foreign and domestic, Wrone said.

The best way to perpetuate the FBI's image was to make Oswald the patsy, he charged.

Hoover wanted Oswald to appear to be a "lone nut, a psychological deviant," Wrone said.

"The FBI announced the solution (to the killing) in advance of the investigation," Wrone said. "On the afternoon of the assassination, they announced Lee Harvey Oswald fired three shots — and only three shots — killing President Kennedy and inflicting the other wounds on (Texas Gov. John) Connally and James Tague," a bystander.

Kennedy had three wounds, Connally five, and Tague was grazed in the face.

If Oswald really acted alone, he had to inflict nine wounds with three bullets, Wrone said.

According to the Warren Report, Oswald fired the rounds from his Mannlicher-Carcano rifle at a distance of 160 to 200 feet as Kennedy and Connally passed the book depository in a motorcade at 12:30 p.m.

"Lee Harvey Oswald had to be the world's greatest marksman to accomplish what has been attributed to him," Wrone said. "But his shooting feat has never been duplicated."

The Warren Commission said that one of the three bullets — probably the first, struck Kennedy at the back of the neck. It then went through soft tissue and exited his neck through his shirt collar and the knot in his necktie.

The bullet then entered Connally. It went through his chest, wrist and thigh — "and then came out the same hole (in the thigh) it went in," Wrone said.

Skeptics of the Warren Report call this bullet "the magic bullet."

Another of the three bullets,

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probably the second, missed Kennedy and Connally, the commission report stated.

The third bullet blew off part of the president's head, the report said.

"What happened to Kennedy and Connally can only be explained by two shots — one in the front and one in the rear — and neither of them from Oswald," Wrone said. "The evidence is just not credible to connect Oswald."

A home movie made at the shooting scene by Abraham Zapruder, a spectator, serves as a time clock for the assassination.

By figuring when the first and last shots took place, it is possible to calculate the entire episode. The film moves at 18.2 frames per second.

The first opportunity to shoot was at frame 210. Connally was hit at frame 235. Kennedy's head exploded at frame 313. Experts determined it takes 2.3 seconds to work the bolt on the gun between shots.

Oswald, if acting alone, did not have not have enough time to fire all the shots, Wrone said.

"The whole assassination took six seconds," he said.

The bullet that allegedly hit Kennedy later was recovered at the hospital.

It fell to the floor from a stretcher attendants thought had been used to bring Connally into the emergency room, Wrone said.

"The FBI found no blood on it (and) no tissue deposits," he said. "Nor was it damaged."

Immediately after the shooting, a police officer ran into the book depository.

He pointed a gun at Oswald, who was standing by a soft-drink machine on the second floor.

Oswald showed no signs of being out of breath from running downstairs, Wrone said.